

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
BUDGET  
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR  
AND PENSIONS  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

April 18, 2005

The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
Chairman  
Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James M. Jeffords  
Ranking Member  
Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Christopher S. Bond  
Chairman  
Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee  
Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus  
Ranking Member  
Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee  
Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Inhofe and Bond and Senators Jeffords and Baucus:

As the Senate continues its work on legislation to reauthorize the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21), I urge you to strongly consider including in the final bill a new initiative, "Projects of National and Regional Significance," which was included in the House-passed version of the reauthorization, H.R. 3.

As you know, there are a number of major projects across the country whose total cost cannot be met by funding mechanisms available at any level of government. This program offers a new opportunity to provide contract authority for state projects that is over and above formula funds.

In my home state of Washington, this new initiative would assist state and local leaders as they grapple with the enormous task of replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct in Seattle. The viaduct is a critical component of the region's transportation infrastructure and economy. With more than \$100 billion of international cargo moving through the Puget Sound region each year, freight mobility through downtown Seattle and along the waterfront is vitally important. The viaduct serves as both a popular freight and commuter route, and also separates truck and rail traffic serving the Port of Seattle on adjacent surface streets.

Built in the 1950s, the Alaskan Way Viaduct extends 2.1 miles along Seattle's waterfront and carries more than 100,000 vehicles per day; it is designated as Washington State Route 99 and is a segment of the National Highway System. The structural integrity of the viaduct was compromised by the 6.8 magnitude Nisqually Earthquake in 2001, and recent studies concluded

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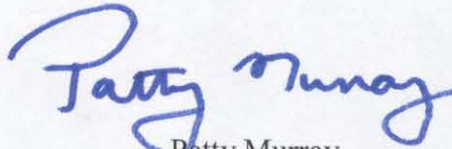
that the viaduct could fail in the event of another seismic event. The loss of the viaduct would force vehicle traffic to be relocated to Interstates 5 and 405, the only other North-South routes through the region, which already support significant vehicle volume.

In December 2004, the City of Seattle, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration selected the preferred alternative for replacing the viaduct. The total cost estimate for the project exceeds \$4 billion. The City is working with regional and state stakeholders, including the state's congressional delegation, to secure funding for the project. While the State recognizes its responsibility to fund at least half of this project, it is clear that state, regional and local funds will not be enough to cover the cost, even when combined with Federal-Aid Highway formula funds.

The significant costs of replacing the viaduct underscore the need for alternative funding mechanisms in TEA-21. The proposed "Projects of National and Regional Significance" is one such alternative. For these reasons, I urge you to strongly consider including this program in the final TEA-21 reauthorization bill. Further, I ask that you ensure that this program provide assistance to these projects in the form of contract authority that is in addition to all formula funds provided to the states.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray  
United States Senate